



## **MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE** *(Neisseria meningitidis)*

### **What is MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?**

Meningococcal disease is a bacterial infection caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*. When this bacterium affects the lining of the brain and spinal cord (the meninges), the condition is called meningococcal meningitis. It is a relatively rare disease and usually occurs as a single event. This type of meningitis requires prompt public health intervention to prevent spread to others.

### **Who gets meningococcal disease?**

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children.

### **What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?**

The symptoms include any of the following: fever, severe sudden headache, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, pain in the shoulders and back, and a red pinpoint rash are the most common signs of this disease. High fever and irritability are signs in a very young child. If the bacteria get into the blood, then a purplish skin rash that looks like bruising may occur.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The symptoms may appear one to 10 days after exposure, but usually within three to four days.

### **How is meningococcal disease spread?**

The meningococci bacteria are spread by direct close contact with nose and throat discharges of an infected person. For example, an infected person can cough or sneeze and another person inhales the contaminated droplets. People can carry the bacteria in their noses and throats without becoming ill; they are healthy carriers. Healthy carriers are able to spread the bacteria to other people, who may develop meningococcal disease with serious symptoms.

### **When and for how long is a case infectious to other people?**

A person may pass the bacteria from the time he/she is first infected and until the bacteria are no longer present in discharges from the nose and throat. Persons are usually no longer infectious after 24 hours of effective antibiotic treatment.

### **What should you do if you suspect meningococcal disease?**

Individuals who experience any of the symptoms described above should consult their physician immediately. Meningococcal disease can be rapidly progressive. With early diagnosis and treatment, the likelihood of full recovery is increased. Early recognition and prompt initiation of antimicrobial therapy are crucial.

### **What should I do if I have been in contact with a diagnosed case of meningococcal disease?**

The use of preventive antibiotics (such as Rifampin or Ciprofloxacin) is recommended for **close contacts** exposed to a person diagnosed with meningococcal disease. Public health officials determine what contacts should be treated. Anyone who suspects they were possibly exposed should consult a physician **immediately**. Beginning preventive antibiotics more than two weeks after exposure is too late to prevent secondary cases.

### **What is the treatment for this disease?**

Certain antibiotics are very effective in treating meningococcal disease and are available from your physician. Generally, penicillin is the drug of choice for meningococcal infections.

**24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156**

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